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BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS  
FUGITIVE

A federal prosecutor charged Thursday that fugitive financier Robert Vesco is living in a beachhouse in Cuba and has been masterminding the smuggling of banned goods from the United States to the communist Caribbean island.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jack Wolfe made the allegation during an argument outside the hearing of the jury that is trying a man for conspiracy to violate the Trading with the Enemy Act by allegedly trying to ship \$729,337.50 worth of sugar processing machinery to Cuba.

Wolfe told U.S. District Judge Filemon Vela that attorney Richard Silvio Bettini allegedly flew to Cuba by way of Mexico and met with Vesco after the trio was charged. Wolfe alleged that Vesco arranged for the \$50,000 cash bonds for the defendants.

Only one defendant, Mexican Salvador Ramirez Preciado, appeared for the trial which opened this week. Another defendant, Alejo Quintero Peralta, reportedly died in Mexico and Albert Anthony Volpe, a Canadian with organized crime links, jumped his \$50,000 bond and is a fugitive.

Bettini has been in the courtroom during two days of trial, but Vela denied Wolfe's motion to develop the lawyer's alleged Vesco connection before the jury.

"Mr. Bettini is a lifelong acquaintance of Mr. Vesco and they went to school together in Detroit," Wolfe said. "He was told to catch a plane to Cancun (in Yucatan, Mexico) and was met at the airport and told he was being flown to Cozumel."

Instead, Wolfe said, Bettini was taken to Havana and was picked up by Vesco.

"Vesco needed a warehouse in Houston and he instructed Bettini to procure it for him. In the end, Vesco did lease the warehouse."

The prosecutor said that a New York man later brought \$240,000 across the border from Matamoros, Mexico, and provided the money to post the cash bonds for the three defendants.

The three were arrested last July 10 at the nearby Harlingen International Airport where U.S. Customs seized 31 crates of machinery being loaded aboard a Boeing 707 jet.

The machinery was to be used to pelletize sugar cane waste materials into energy pellets that would have allowed the Cubans to protect much-needed petroleum fuels and fire their sugar mills with the pelletized pulp, or bagasse, which is left over after sugar is extracted, federal officials said.

Federal officials alleged that Vesco, wanted in the United States in connection with \$300 million mutual fund swindle, is orchestrating a scheme to thwart an American economic blockade of Cuba by routing prohibited technology through Canada and other nations with open trade relations with the Fidel Castro regime.

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In the case on trial, prosecutors allege the three men paid a charter airline \$30,000 to fly the goods to Merida, Mexico, instead of the destination of Costa Rica listed on the flight plan. From there, they charge, a Canadian air freight company was to have transferred to the merchandize to Canada, where it would be picked up by a Cuban plane.

The Brownsville Herald Thursday quoted government sources as saying the FBI, CIA and other national security organizations were compiling a file on the case.

The report that Vesco may be in Cuba was the first on his whereabouts since the fugitive U.S. officials requested his extradition from Antigua.

Vesco lived awhile in Costa Rica until he was expelled in 1978 for allegedly getting involved in internal politics. He then went to the Bahamas where he also was expelled in 1981 for alleged drug trafficking.

Vesco allegedly was involved in schemes involving both the Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter administrations.

Nixon's friend, Bebe Robozo, once was investigated for his connections to Vesco, and during the Carter years, Vesco allegedly attempted to influence the White House through W. Spencer Lee IV, Carter's former campaign manager, to help solve his legal problems.